

Poems  
*by*  
John  
Rodker



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of the  
Author  
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Whitechapel

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# Poems

*by*

John Rodker



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1 Osborn Street  
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*CERTAIN of these Poems have appeared in the EGOIST, the NEW AGE, and the MANCHESTER PLAYGOER ; while the "London Night" is about to appear in POETRY. To the editors of these periodicals my acknowledgments are due.*

J. R.



*To*  
**S O N I A**



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## The Poet to his Poems.

### Introduction to his First Volume.

*"POETS starve so near the stars  
Because they like to think of bars  
Of pure bright gold near them in heaven, . . .  
And things we hardly understand,  
Like mystic numbers three and seven—  
And all the things we know are dead  
In a dead land.  
They talk of brains from which 'thought bled'—  
Poor stricken brains—what could they mean?  
We're very happy here; we've been  
Through love and life and such like things,  
And have not burst our hearts—  
If our loves leave us, what of that?  
There's no wound smarts  
Forever. . . . If our life's flat  
It's only that we cannot spend  
All we would. . . .  
Now should this poet lend  
Us something . . . (if he could), . . .  
We'd show him life more splendid far  
Than all his dreams or poems are."*



## A Slice of Life.

THE sky broods over the river—  
 The waves tumble and flee.  
 And down go the dead things ever  
 Down to the sea.

A dog, an empty keg,  
 An outworn hat.  
 And with a broken leg  
 A pregnant cat.



## In the Strand.

DESPERATE and disdainful showed his wares, . . .  
 Stupid things, . . . laces, studs, . . .  
 I bought . . . his look . . . and this verse.



# The Gas Flame.

To Kathleen Dillon.

THIS yellow, flickering flame  
That endless anguished writhes—in endless obscure  
pain

Contorted. . . . Thrusting ever upwards till the brain  
Swoons with its arid pallor, feeling it flicker, . . . aim  
High . . . and ash-rill for clean air. . . . It came  
Bursting upon its stalk, and sudden drooping in sick bloom  
Poured down the room ;

Trickling into the obscure, obscene places where the brain  
reels ;

Incredibly mute, its pallor weaves me fire,  
Bursting and searing the lead eye-balls with false wheels  
That grate forever, clashing meet and sudden. . . .

Nothing. . . . Then again it writhes and stands incredibly  
mute,

Swaying in a little weary spire  
So very faint. . . .

There is a tale of Arcady, . . . but no . . .

This bloom, this shuddering bloom

That trickles into the obscure, obscene places

Making the brain reel. . . .

There is a tale of Arcady . . . with marshes . . .

And swallows three that headlong wheel . . .



And . . . faces. . . .  
 But no. . . . This bloom, this shuddering, drooping bloom  
 That trickles into the brain's obscure, obscene places,  
 With clatter of the first boot on the floor  
 And darkness surging sore on brains like ours. . . .  
 Will no one pluck the bloom, the magic, weary bloom  
 That blows but once, ere night droops  
 Very weary in after the long war. . . .  
 There is a tale of Arcady. . . .

## Soria Moria.

B EYOND the soul's edges . . .

Drily whisper the sedges.  
 Patches of the lake gleam mournful white. . . .  
 There is a hint of billowing towers  
 And the swish of huddling trees. . . .  
 But the lake glimmers in the moonlight,  
 And in some sad places is so giddily deep. . . .

Laughter and jangle of bells, . . .  
 And something asleep. . . .

Laughter and jangle of bells  
 Beyond the soul's edges. . . .



## Immanence.

COOL water pours  
 Into dim silence.  
 Through the tense shade  
 The musk of far roses  
 Gloses  
 The sense. . . .

Cool water pours . . .  
 Dissolving thin sleep  
 From the corners of mind. . .  
 But the eyes are more blind  
 And the slumber more deep. . . .

The fierce heart o' the rose  
 Bursts in the sun. . . .

. . . cool . . . water . . . pours.

## The Music Hall.

THE group soul anguished drives up to the vane;  
 Shivers over the clamant band,  
 And tremulously sinks upon its padded seat, . . .  
 With such a pleasant shiver of the bowels.  
 (The first faint peristalt . . .)  
 And a thin hunger somewhere.  
 Beauty or woman; something not over-rare  
 That will absorb the thrill, the gushing energetic thrill. . . .  
 We watch and smoke . . . our trembling hands  
 That flutter for a space an arc of light  
 With acrid trailing fume. . . .  
 But oh . . . the hunger. . . .



. . . for the soul is as a little bird mounting to heaven rejoicing, when the bars of thought, which are its cage, lie broken about it. . . .

There is a little room inside my mind  
With mirrors lined . . .  
It must be like the eye of some huge fly. . . .

Whoever enters there swoons deep and deep . . .  
So deep, the scared soul quite forgets to weep . . .  
And wonders at itself. . . . By and bye

Breasting the night . . . it will forget  
How distant thrust the light . . . how wet  
And comforting it drenched him; who might not descry

Nor place nor footing in that blackness . . . ah! so frail . . .  
Where scaur and precipice were mirrored pale  
Drifting in icy darkness pitifully . . .

And marvel at the horror of the sight  
He barely may recall . . . one light  
Bursting upon one mirror—

Then mirror unto mirror . . . till he saw  
That swart and anguished wriggling thing;  
His soul . . . take wing . . .

And ever mounting; higher and more high  
Warble a song of joy . . . so glad  
That being found it too might fructify.



## Under the Trees, II.

IT is so desolate:  
 This blown leaf softly falling,  
 Without sound—and helpless.  
 Each little wind thrills it—  
 Still without sound.  
 Not a bird sings . . .  
 Not a leaf stirs . . .  
 Suddenly the tawny brothers whisper  
 And are silent.  
 A long thin silence. . . .  
 The twilight grows,  
 And now and then the little brothers whisper,  
 And stir softly,  
 And lie still. . . .  
 “Come little sister,  
 You will sleep in a bed all agolden.”  
 One star hides in a tree top  
 From its pale mother,  
 The little far moon,  
 Who washes the spangles  
 From her caught children. . . .  
 Poor stars. . . .  
 Little sad wind  
 O touch my hair.



## Under the Trees, III.

WIND waking in the leaves—  
It is cold . . .

And pass wings?

Wind waking in the leaves.  
Each cold star burns them  
Till they stir  
Under its spear.

Wind waking  
Sad  
And pitiful.

## Consummation.

SHE was so tired after the night.  
Out of a dream all things grew utter white,  
And calm with peace beyond imagining.  
With one bird brooding there that dared not sing  
But preened one wing.

Out of the widening white haze  
Desire now mocked her. All her virgin days  
Swung thin and shrivelled; in lush undergrowth  
Made ponderous her limbs—and at her mouth  
Bittered her lips with drouth.



Yet sweet the bitterness thereof  
 When each limb had sucked full from limbs of love.  
 Breast from soft breast and thigh from urgent thigh  
 And lip from lip . . . while night passed by  
 Most wearily.

Leaving the needless heart to labour on:  
 Though life grew vain when the dear lust was gone,  
 And yet too tired to wish for Death at all.

## The Mercury Vapour Lamps.

AT evening the blossom of the sun is blown;  
 Its wantoned vivid music is not heard.  
 Its perfume from the earth for one short night is flown.

Then does its spawn at some dark word.  
 Swarm into many coloured bloom . . . clustering more  
 strange

Than any shape that any man may know  
 In all those spacious heavenly fields, where change  
 Unending the world-stars . . . where all is flow  
 And ceaseless passionate call and counter-call.

Here where each spore bursts, where fall  
 From some, swift-shooting stars, strong shreds of light.  
 Where some among them whisper in the night;  
 Some whistle shrill . . . some hiss and click,



And mutter fearfully, some trick  
 Themselves in scarlet; some in gold.  
 And there are those which stamens hold  
 Fiery serpents fold on fold.

Now does the bloom that guards the night creep out.  
 It writhes from out its nest. Its pallid flow  
 Etiolates the dark: its sullen glow  
 Pierces thro' all things. Now the shout  
 And bustle grow more sinister; the street  
 Grooms pale and waste as any place in hell.  
 While at the hurrying feet  
 Clatters the chase of those proud souls that fell.

It striketh to the heart. It shards the flesh.  
 The livid faces speak the livid soul;  
 And each soul shows it livid in the mesh.  
 Yet will your love not pass through whole.  
 Her smile shall come two violet back-writhed lips  
 Round pallid teeth; and her dead hips  
 Shall no more flex for you . . . ah! the killed joy.  
 Yet glad in this, Love cannot more make happy or annoy.

O! it is subtle this:  
 This monstrous spawning of the sun with man.  
 That cankers in sweet flesh and in each kiss;  
 And leaves us wandering, all wan  
 And purposeless within this bruit . . . where none dare  
 wait.



Yet hurrying is quite lost . . . the spate  
Takes speed . . . and noise . . .

Like a huge worm it sprawls,  
Some orchis tangled in some monstrous place.  
Where the far light comes trembling under the vast walls  
That stretch forever . . .                      Yet . . . for a space  
Music will rise; a pæan from the sun  
Though Death creep down 'ere twilight is begun.

## Sleep-Sick.

J OY has gone out from me—and warmth—  
And whether she sleep or no  
It matters not . . .  
Or whether the sleep be long  
I will not heed . . .  
For my lids grow heavy as night is  
Without stars.

Have I not offered up my hours before her pain  
Till all my days went thin as her own pain?  
And now my lids grow heavy as night is  
Without stars . . .  
And she sleeps.



Whether she sleep or no  
 I must not heed  
 Lest I wake.

Whether she sleep or no  
 I will not heed . . .  
 Or whether the sleep be long  
 I care not now.

## Spelled.

**P**EERING through the tangle of her hair  
 I saw

The sun shafts  
 Splintering.

The enchanted web  
 That was all bronze.

And in cool deeps behind  
 I dreamed . . .

While the warm shafts  
 Splintered  
 On that enchanted web  
 Which was all golden  
 Against my eyes.

Till blood grew thin.



## The Storm.

NO wind in all that place.  
Only the sun beating down.  
Like sleepy cats we moved within the shade.

And when I touched him  
Such a thrill went through my arm  
And ceased where my ring was. . . .  
It left me tingling. . . .  
The air was so full charged  
Of the electric force,  
It overflowed in mystic flare.  
Pale blue, it dazed the sky  
Pale blue  
And vast  
It challenged all the sky.

In the evening  
A small chill wind  
Brought back the moisture to our veins of wilted flowers.

The rain came  
Swarming.

Challenging the night the western sky lights up  
Thundering.

And all the sky is in a flare  
With all the winds  
And all the stars



Rushing . . .  
And the rain  
Swarming.

The moon  
Mad queen of the earth,  
Walks in the pools,  
On the bridge's edge  
The raindrops burst in spray  
Dancing.

## To the London Sparrow.

GAMINS.  
Drab and  
Cockney.  
Wavering  
but not much  
between feeding and  
. . . !

Thriftless.  
Laying up children . . .  
Dung growing less too.  
What will become of you.  
Your four broods yearly . . .  
(or is it oftener.)

Will you go back to the country . . .  
Corrupt poor relations. . . .



## Vibro-Massage.

MOIST warm towels  
 at my face  
 smell queerly . . .  
 chill me. . . .

I am afraid. . . .

. . . Unguents  
 smoothed into my face  
 like yellow silk  
 over my forehead.  
 . . . smoothed into cheek  
 into hollow.

Spasm . . .  
 Stress . . .  
 Pain . . .  
 Pressure  
 of keen sweet tears  
 from the lachrymals.

Brows  
 Nose  
 Cheek  
 Chin  
 exploring . . .  
 murmuring . . .  
 pulsing. . . .



Body waiting . . .  
 yearning . . .  
 dreading. . . .

Again . . .

Ecstatic . . .  
 Eyes shut,  
 Body shut,  
 Muscles tense,  
 Ecstasy  
 like a kiss . . .  
 the touch of hated hands. . . .

Moist warm towels  
 at my face  
 smell queerly . . .  
 chill me. . . .

Cold wet towels burn me . . .  
 their smell of death.

## The Pub.

**H**OW long, how very long have I been sitting here.  
 Tongue-tied and fixed within this murmuring stability.  
 Gaunt and immutable—through eyes that see not  
 Dim faces watch me.

The automatic piano plays and plays—  
 I grow sick, with anguish at the heart.  
 The piano thumps, skirls, goes out.



I fumble for a penny—

More music . . .

And again I grow sick.

Huge jewels glow behind the counter

Where the light comes through full bottles.

And still they urge me “Drink.”

While the black-stoled murmurous figures

Dole the pain

At jingle of the coins.

Why does the barmaid there drink stout

Furtively.

Surely her breasts are big enough.

## The After-Dinner Hooter.

PEACE.

A voice

Raucous, distensive,

Shatters and smashes

Concentrical.

Undermining

Unto the dimmest

Furthest proliferation

Of this pale whiteness.



Shivers the sphere . . . jangling.

Peace . . . trembling . . .

Still, still . . . be still!

Jangling, shivering . . . trembling.

Voices.

Shatters the sphere . . . jarring,

Bursting, jarring, bursting . . .

Still! still! Be still . . .

Ah . . .! shivering, BURSTING.



## Item.

To Margaret Drew.

YOU said  
 your heart was  
 pieces of strings  
 in a  
 peacock blue satin  
 bag.



# London Night.

Introduction.

Still the void turns . . .  
 And creaks . . .  
 And spatters me  
 With spume of gaunt fatuity . . .  
 And again turns . . .  
 Unceasingly . . .  
 Till the quiet burns.

The night is full, with laughter in its wings  
 (And faint wan faces ouched in yearning  
 sky)

Laughter that weals the face of night . . .  
 and stings . . .

The anguished soul drifts by.

I will not go . . .

Still the void turns . . .  
 And sickening thuds . . .  
 Creaking . . .

Still the quiet burns . . .  
 With flame that floods  
 The secret inner sky . . .  
 And yearns to the sound  
 And to the laughter . . .  
 I am called.

Hesitant, . . .

Still the void turns. . . .



- In the bus.      Hum of the town . . .  
                          Splashes of faces  
                          In garish places  
                          Drive ever down. . . .
- In the Park.      The gaunt trees grope to the night.  
                          The distant magic of the night . . .  
                          And touch the sky . . .  
                          The faces linger to the light  
                          And endlessly drift by . . .  
                          With shuffle of far feet like leaves that  
                          strike  
                          And flicker on the way . . .  
                          With little ripples of dry sound. . . .
- The band.      Noise of the band . . . and the wind  
                          asleep . . .  
                          Over the wind I mount on wings  
                          And swing and gleam and sheer and  
                          float . . .
- How chill it is grown . . . and how remote  
                          the faces  
                          And thin and very faint. . . . And the  
                          wind sings. . . .
- Interlude.      Shop girl, poor clerk  
                          Ephemerons . . . wing your swift way  
                          A little love—it will not mark



The soul unused to day . . .  
 So cold, so far away you seem  
 Shop girl . . . poor clerk. . . .

I am the dreamer. . . . Are you the dream?

How the noise mocks me. . . . And the  
 pain!

And they laugh about me. . . . While the  
 trees unheard . . .

Though not to one or three the water calls  
 in vain.

But only as an inner word . . .

For she is much more amorous than—

And will, not prize her sweets too dear . . .

(For after all we are poor men

And may not know love . . . though  
 here . . .)

Hyde Park  
 Corner.

Stress of the crowd . . . And the whole of  
 it mute . . .

Tunics that thrill in the light . . . till you  
 look at his face

With a rush of hate . . . and hate for the  
 grace

Of the "slavey" wooing the brute.

Stress of the crowd. . . .



Picture Palace.    Breathless . . . The giggles cease . . .  
                          The ruddled alcove wafts me peace . . .  
                          And the clicking of the reel . . .  
                          Flicker of light . . .  
                          We thrill to the rush and the clatter . . .  
                                          and spatter  
                          The night with our souls and . . . steal  
                          The soul of night . . .  
                          The girl at the box was very sweet . . .  
                          Manicured nails, and massaged smile, and  
                                          teeth  
                          Resplendent . . . Flicker of light . . .  
                          The rush and the clatter . . . With dust  
                                          of fatuity  
                          Spattered . . . out of the void. . . .  
  
                          Always the streets and the giggle of girls  
                          Women from where? God! but the night  
                                          must be full of them. . . .

Anarchist Club.    Quiet at last . . . she there . . .  
                          The babble of hot voices strangely  
                                          soothes . . .  
                          The coffee is black . . . Anvernus' waters  
                                          where  
                          The souls disquiets flare . . .  
                          And she . . . Her face like halfold ivory  
                          A something past its whiteness . . .  
                          And cheeks ahollow. . . . Smoking ever  
                                          talks she



And disdains me quite. Not this the place.  
 Later perhaps she will not say me nay . . .  
 And ever and anon someone will say  
 "A bas" and "saboter."

How came we here?

Cafè.

The sybaritic waiter brings us drink. . . .  
 Thick lips and mottled face . . .  
 . . . I think  
 His eyes go back to ancient arcadies . . .  
           in the black  
 Secret eyes of her . . .  
 She is the beauty at the feast . . .  
 My friends and their friend flock  
 With words well greased . . .  
 Very fluent when the ideas flow . . .  
 Oh! but the babble wearies me  
 And the lights . . .  
 And rococo. . . .

Liqueur.

One lotus bud swings to the harbour of  
           my soul  
 And bursts . . .  
 And all its mystic whole  
 And each glad petal . . . thirsts  
 Unto all heaven . . . far roots  
 Insinuating . . .



Wondrous fruits  
Creating.  
Becoming of all things . . .  
And God is singing . . .  
Such a little song. . . .

My moon, my almond-eyed delight goes  
from me  
And I am old . . .  
I am far older than she is . . .  
And now she laughs at my grey hairs . . .  
Yet may I not put forth to chasten her . . .  
Lest she rebel . . .  
I will use songs and fair words  
To call her to my couch. . . .

Then she shall languish forever  
In the prison of my "infinite mercy."

Night. . . .  
I am afraid.









Two steps wide. . . .

I shall stumble if there are more  
stairs.

Two steps wide

Each their white perfection of  
form.

A million years pass.

With naked feet I will walk  
these stairs . . .

Caress their perfection . . .

The way will be shorter

Each their white perfection of  
form . . .

Horrible. . . .

A million years pass.

I will walk naked

For any coolness that may  
be . . .

Many years pass.

There is no coolness.

A million years pass.

I will cast off this mind

That whatever tremor there  
may be

Must stir me. . . .



A million years pass.

Nothing . . .  
White perfection  
Black and immobile  
Fills me. . . .

A million years pass.

I will think on life.

Many, many years pass.

Each stair  
In white perfection of form  
Black and dead  
Draws me.

A million years pass.

I am not tired.

A million years pass.

But

Many years pass . . .

Down!

Many years pass . . .

Down . . .

Many years pass . . .

Down?

Woven into the dark  
I . . . and yet  
Not I,  
Am . . .  
Was . . .

Many years pass.

Was?

Many, many years pass.

Am?



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